



Madagascar

International Religious Freedom Report 2002

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 226,657 square miles, and its population is 15,982,563. Most of the population is nominally Christian, of which an estimated 4.5 million are Roman Catholics, 3.5 million are Protestants belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) (mostly from Fianarantsoa North), 2 million are Lutherans (mostly from Fianarantsoa South), and less than 1 million are Anglicans (mostly in Antananarivo and Toamasina). Most other citizens are followers of traditional indigenous religions centered on ancestor worship. Although there are no exact figures, Muslims constitute slightly less than an estimated 10 percent of the population (concentrated in the north and northwest); they include ethnic Malagasy as well as most of the ethnic Indians who immigrated within the past 100 years. There are a few Hindus among the Indians.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country, including Catholics, Protestants of various denominations, the Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Religious groups must register and obtain authorization from the Ministry of Interior.

Mainline denominations are organized in the Council of Christian Churches of Madagascar. This group regularly expresses political and economic concerns as well as religious concerns. Severely destabilized by its involvement as a mediator in the political conflict that brought about the Third Republic Council in 1993, the Council withdrew from the political scene for several years. In 2000 the Council, as part of its commitment to justice, engaged its member churches in the monitoring of elections. The Council increased its political involvement in 2001, playing an active role in the observation of the disputed presidential elections. In early 2002, the Council continued to wield significant political pressure, particularly on President Didier Ratsiraka to submit to a recount of the December 2001 election results.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country. Several church-related organizations, some with international affiliations, operate freely in health and social services, development projects, schools, and higher education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were several credible reports that the Government threatened and mistreated church pastors, namely FJKM pastors and particularly those in the northern province of Antsiranana, during the period covered by this report. In each case, the pastor targeted for abuse was active and visible in the Committee to Elect Marc Ravalomanana (KMMR); the mistreatment was politically motivated and did not constitute religious discrimination. In December 2001, presidential elections were held; both candidates, Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana, claimed victory. During the following 7 months, there was a substantial increase in human rights abuses, repeated attempts at international mediation, barricades of the capital, attempted secession of several provinces, and a military campaign to control the island, as supporters of both candidates attempted to take control of the country. In May 2002, following a recount of the ballots, Ravalomanana was declared president; he was sworn in later that month.

In isolated cases, in response to rising insecurity linked to the ongoing political crisis in early 2002, local authorities banned religious gatherings and public observances such as the procession of palms. Such restrictions did not appear to target specific congregations, nor were they based on religious grounds.

Numerous independent evangelical groups operate freely in all regions of the country, some using their own local media facilities, and the Council of Christian Churches is permitted regular weekly broadcasts on the government-controlled Radio Madagascar. However, since January 2001, the local branch of the Kimbanguist church, whose membership is less than 5,000, has been prevented from broadcasting its religious service on Radio Madagascar. This restriction appears to be politically motivated, and apparently is based on the pastor's support for the leader of an opposition party and the political, rather than religious, content of his broadcasts.

In 1998 an organization widely perceived to be affiliated with the Reverend Sun Myung Moon was refused registration, apparently due to concerns about its use of mind-control practices. There is no indication that the organization has reapplied for registration, nor that the Government has changed its decision.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2001 a Protestant missionary whose family name is Moon was subjected to government harassment due to confusion surrounding his possible connection to the Moon organization and the Unification Church; however, there were no further incidents during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There is some ethnic Malagasy resentment of the ethnic Indian community, but this primarily is due to perceptions that the relative prosperity of the ethnic Indian community is due to the corruption of government officials and the economic exploitation of ethnic Malagasy customers.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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